Retirement Adjustment: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Advancements
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In this article, we review both theoretical and empirical advancements in retirement adjustment research. After reviewing and integrating current theories about retirement adjustment, we propose a resource-based dynamic perspective to apply to the understanding of retirement adjustment. We then review empirical findings that are associated with the key research questions in this literature: (a) What is the general impact of retirement on the individual? and (b) What are the factors that influence retirement adjustment quality? We also highlight important future research directions that may be fruitful for psychologists to pursue in this area.

**Keywords:** retirement adjustment, older workers, resource perspective

Retirement from work is one of the major life course transitions in late adult life. Associated with this transition, the question of how well individuals adjust to retirement has been a focus of interest to researchers as well as to the popular media (Wang & Shultz, 2010). Although retirement has received extensive study, the impact of retirement on the individual and the factors important for a successful adjustment in retirement still remain less clear than other aspects of retirement phenomena (e.g., retirement decision making and retirement planning; Wang, 2007). It is important to study retirement adjustment because it directly provides information about how to improve the quality of postretirement life. In addition, studying retirement adjustment provides an opportunity for researchers to understand how people simultaneously adjust to internal (i.e., physical and psychological aging) and external (i.e., lifestyle and societal norms) challenges in their later life. Findings from this research have the potential to yield information about other complex adjustment processes people experience when facing significant internal and external changes.

Until the 1960s, studies on retirement adjustment typically viewed retirement as a “crisis” event that created a challenge to personal well-being (van Solinge & Henkens, 2008). Although researchers still view retirement as a challenging, life-changing event, it has been acknowledged in recent studies that retirement may also have beneficial effects (e.g., Mein, Martikainen, Hemingway, Stansfeld, & Marmot, 2003; Wang, 2007). There is also growing recognition of the fact that the impact of retirement may vary not only across individuals but also within individuals over time. Thus, empirical studies have started to probe and examine this heterogeneity in retirement adjustment (e.g., Pinkwart & Schindler, 2007; van Solinge & Henkens, 2005, 2008; Wang, 2007). Nevertheless, little effort has been invested in integrating the different theoretical perspectives used by researchers to study this heterogeneity in retirement adjustment. Therefore, the first purpose of this article is to review and integrate current theories about retirement adjustment and establish a resource-based dynamic perspective as a coherent theoretical framework to guide further research on retirement adjustment. In particular, we argue that retirement adjustment is a longitudinal process during which retirees’ levels of adjustment (i.e., psychological comfort regarding the retirement life) may fluctuate as a function of individual resources and changes in these resources. Further, as in most other studies on this topic, we assume that adjustment is reached when individuals are not preoccupied with the retirement transition but are comfortable with the changed circumstances of life in retirement (i.e., are able to integrate retirement into their lives; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981).

The second purpose of this article is to review empirical findings in retirement adjustment research. To organize these empirical findings, we make a distinction between retirement adjustment as a process of getting used to the changed circumstances of life and the outcomes of this process in terms of retirement adjustment quality. The retirement adjustment process may be more or less challenging to retiring individuals, and this variability may translate into differences in retirement adjustment quality over time and across individuals. Consequently, the key questions addressed in this review of empirical findings include the following: (a) What is the general impact of

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retirement on the individual (i.e., how well is the individual getting used to the retirement life)? and (b) What are the factors that influence retirement adjustment quality? We aim to use this review to summarize the up-to-date knowledge regarding these research questions. When reviewing the empirical findings, we also tie them to the proposed resource-based dynamic perspective when feasible and illustrate the utility of applying this perspective to reconciling inconsistent theoretical predictions and improving future studies.

At the end of this review, we highlight important future research directions that may be fruitful for psychologists to pursue in this area. These future directions address both methodological issues and empirical gaps in the literature. We hope the consideration of these future directions will enrich the empirical findings about retirement adjustment and provide additional knowledge for refining the theoretical framework.

**Theoretical Review and Integration for Conceptualizing Retirement Adjustment**

The major theories that have been applied to the study of retirement adjustment include role theory, continuity theory, stage theory, the life course perspective, and the resource perspective. Below, we first review each of these specific theories. We then integrate them and conceptualize retirement adjustment as a resource-based dynamic process.

**Role Theory**

Role theory emphasizes the importance of the role exit and the role transition in retirement adjustment. To the extent that one is highly invested in a particular role (e.g., the work role), feelings of self-worth tend to be associated with the ability to carry out that role in an effective manner (Ashforth, 2001). Therefore, being retired can be characterized as a role transition (Riley & Riley, 1994), which includes the processes of losing or weakening work roles (e.g., the worker role, the organizational member role, and the career role) and strengthening the family member role and the community member role. Role theorists argue that the role loss resulting from retirement transition can cause people to feel anxious or depressed, which may lead to low levels of well-being in retirement (Riley & Riley, 1994). These feelings may be due to the functional importance of work-related roles, which serve to maintain one’s positive self-image (Feldman, 1994). Consequently, one’s life after retirement might be viewed as less satisfying than one’s life during the years when one was employed. On the other hand, retirees with other role involvements or those who retire from unpleasant jobs may be less troubled by, and even pleased with, the loss of those work roles. For example, for individuals who find their jobs stressful or burdensome, retiring could be a relief from ongoing strains and conflicts. Also, for individuals who would like to engage more fully in the roles of family member and community member, retirement is an opportunity for them to free up time to enjoy the rewards and responsibilities tied to those roles.

**Continuity Theory**

Continuity theory emphasizes the consistency of life patterns over time (i.e., the accommodation of life changes without the experience of stressful disruption; Atchley, 1999). According to Atchley (1999), there is considerable continuity in identity and self-concept over the retirement transition, and this continuity contributes to the individual’s retirement adjustment. Rather than focusing on retirement as a disruptive role loss, continuity theorists view it as an opportunity to maintain social relationship and lifestyle patterns. Thus, this theory predicts that there should not be a significant drop in well-being when people transition from work into retirement life unless severe difficulty in maintaining those general patterns is experienced.

**Stage Theory**

The literature on employee retirement has recognized that the workforce exit process often happens gradually and that people may have multiple job exits and entries using various forms of bridge employment before they fully retire (e.g., Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Shultz, 2009). As such, retirement adjustment constitutes a long-term process during which variation in retirees’ well-being may be observed. This is indeed the premise put forth by stage theory (e.g., Atchley, 1976; Gall, Evans, & Howard, 1997). According to stage theory, early in the transition to retirement, retirees experience a honeymoon stage, in which they may feel more energetic and satisfied as they pursue new activities and roles. Later on, retirees may experience a disenchantment stage, in which they realize that they have fewer resources and/or had unrealistic expectations about retire-
ment. As time passes, retirees enter a reorientation stage, during which they reevaluate their life status, accept limitations, and focus on further adjustment to retirement. Eventually, retirees enter the stability stage, settling into a predictable daily life pattern until death or disability terminates their retirement. So far, stage theory has received little direct support from empirical studies. The strength of this theory (i.e., making specific predictions regarding the dynamic nature of retirement adjustment) may also be its weakness because of the stringent pattern it predicts. Further, the specific time course for each stage is also unclear.

**The Life Course Perspective**

The life course principle of “human agency within structure” implies that individuals have plans, make choices, and undertake actions within the opportunities and constraints of their social worlds, which are shaped by personal history and social circumstances (Settersten, 2003). The life course perspective thus emphasizes that life transitions are contextually embedded, which implies that the experiences of retirement adjustment are contingent on the specific circumstances under which the adjustment occurs. For example, a growing body of literature has revealed that perceived control over the departure from the workforce is crucial to retirement adjustment (e.g., Henkens, van Solinge, & Gallo, 2008; van Solinge & Henkens, 2005). These circumstances may also include individual attributes (e.g., demographic characteristics, finance and health status, and transition related abilities and skills; J. E. Kim & Moen, 2002), individual history factors (e.g., how people dealt with previous transitions, their work and leisure habits, and their previous workforce participation patterns; Orel, Ford, & Brock, 2004), and current and past job-related experience (e.g., former job attitudes, former job characteristics, and career trajectories; van Solinge & Henkens, 2008; Wang, Zhan, Liu, & Shultz, 2008). The general premise is that if an individual has cultivated a flexible style in dealing with previous life transitions, is less socially integrated with their work, and has the attributes that help smooth and accomplish the transition, he or she will be more likely to prepare well for the adjustment and to achieve better outcomes of the adjustment (Wang & Shultz, 2010).

The life course perspective also emphasizes that the experiences in one life sphere (e.g., work life) influence and are influenced by experiences in other life spheres (e.g., marital life). According to this concept of interdependent life spheres, nonwork life spheres are important for retirement adjustment because they provide retirees with alternative salient identities after retirement and offer opportunities for retirees to engage in meaningful and desirable activities after retirement. Supporting this argument is consistent evidence that individuals who are married and strongly identify with their family roles have more positive experiences in retirement (e.g., Calasanti, 1996). Van Solinge and Henkens (2005) have also shown that adjustment problems faced by one partner affect the quality of the other partner’s retirement experience.

**The Resource Perspective**

Although the life course perspective provides a general framework for analyzing retirement adjustment and points to the utility of studying a broad range of variables, it offers few concrete hypotheses about how these variables impact retirement adjustment (Wang, 2007). Consequently, researchers often rely on a resource perspective to predict how variables may be associated with retirement adjustment. According to Hobfoll (2002), resources can be broadly defined as the total capability an individual has to fulfill his or her centrally valued needs. Reviewing different types of resources studied in previous retirement research, Wang (2007) suggested that this total capability may include the individual’s physical resources (e.g., muscle strength; McArdle, Vasilaki, & Jackson, 2002), cognitive resources (e.g., processing speed and working memory; Park, 2000), motivational resources (e.g., self-efficacy; Bandura, 1997), financial resources (e.g., salary and pension; Hobfoll, 2002), social resources (e.g., social network and social support; S. Kim & Feldman, 2000), and emotional resources (e.g., mood and affectivity; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, in press). The central premise of this resource perspective for studying retirement adjustment is that the ease of adjustment is the direct result of the individual’s access to resources. Specifically, when people have more resources to fulfill the needs they value in retirement, they will experience less difficulty in adjusting to retirement. On the other hand, decreases in retirees’ resources will have adverse effects on their retirement adjustment. Therefore, according to this perspective, to understand retirement adjustment, researchers should focus on examining variables that have a direct impact on retirees’ different types of resources.
Retirement Adjustment as a Resource-Based Dynamic Process

After this brief review of the current theories about retirement adjustment, it is important to note that each of them can provide insight only into a specific aspect of retirement adjustment. As such, a more integrated theoretical framework is needed to account for the complex nature of retirement adjustment and to guide the future research in this field. To address this gap, we propose to apply a resource-based dynamic perspective to further the theoretical development of retirement adjustment. Specifically, we argue that retirement adjustment is a longitudinal process during which retirees’ levels of adjustment may fluctuate as a function of individual resources and changes in these resources. Therefore, instead of focusing on the absolute good or bad impact that retirement has on retirees’ well-being, we focus on the underlying mechanism through which retirement has this impact. As illustrated in Figure 1, by incorporating the resource perspective, variation in the level of adjustment along the retirement adjustment process can be viewed as a result of resource changes. In other words, if over time (e.g., \( t_2 \) to \( t_4 \) in Figure 1) a retiree’s total resource does not change significantly (e.g., because the retiree successfully maintains prior lifestyles and activities), he or she may experience a significant change in adjustment level. Alternatively, if over time (e.g., \( t_2 \) to \( t_3 \) in Figure 1) a retiree’s total resource significantly decreases (e.g., through losing a major income source), he or she may experience a negative change in adjustment level. Further, if over time (e.g., \( t_1 \) to \( t_2 \) or \( t_3 \) to \( t_4 \) in Figure 1) an individual’s retirement enables him or her to invest significantly more resources (e.g., through gaining cognitive resources that were previously occupied by a stressful job) in fulfilling centrally valued needs, he or she may experience a positive change in adjustment level. Thus, unlike role theory, continuity theory, and stage theory, which we reviewed earlier, this theoretical framework has the flexibility to accommodate a variety of longitudinal patterns for retirement adjustment. This flexibility significantly enriches the theoretical approach to understanding individual differences in the longitudinal process of retirement adjustment. This framework also relaxes the sequential assumption regarding the development stages in retirement adjustment (e.g., as specified in stage theory). Therefore, recognizing the dynamic nature of retirement adjustment, we contend that time courses are less important in describing the retirement adjustment process; retirees’ well-being could fluctuate up and down at any given time point, following the variation in their total resources.

Moreover, this resource-based dynamic perspective can also be applied to identifying factors that may influence retirement adjustment quality. Specifically, this framework offers a large variety of antecedents that could influence various retirees’ resources in the adjustment process, including variables from the macro level, the organizational level, the job level, the household level, and the individual level, as illustrated in Figure 1. In addition, the central constructs in the life course perspective, such as the characteristics of the retirement transition, the contexts of retirement adjustment, and the interdependent life spheres, can all be viewed as pointing to variables that may influence retirees’ resources at different time points and in different aspects of the adjustment process. Adopting the resource-based dynamic perspective may lead to a more comprehensive and fruitful examination of different factors that influence retirement adjustment. It should be noted that the utility of the resource-based dynamic perspective is consistent with the “balance of resources to deficits” approach that is often adopted in understanding human adaptation to transitions (e.g., Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981). This approach emphasizes that adaptation to a transition depends on the ratio of resources to deficits in terms of the transition itself, the pre–post environment, and the individual’s sense of competency, well-being, and health (Schlossberg, 1981).

Finally, combining both the dynamic perspective and the resource perspective to conceptualize retirement adjustment also provides new opportunities for researchers to understand other characteristics of the adjustment process. For example, although role theory, continuity theory, and stage theory provide specific predictions regarding the downward and/or upward trends in retirees’ well-being change over time, they may not be as informative in terms of understanding the turning points (e.g., \( t_2 \), \( t_3 \), and \( t_4 \) in Figure 1) that connect two different trends in the longitudinal adjustment process. However, if one adopts the resource perspective, it is not difficult to hypothesize that certain individual differences (e.g., openness to change, goal orientation in retirement, and need for structure), which may impact retirees’ motivational resources, and certain environmental factors (e.g., family support, community cohesiveness, and unemployment rate in the local labor market), which may impact retirees’ financial and
social resources, may predict how fast the turning points will be reached for retirees who experience negative change first but later experience positive change in their well-being. This is because these individual differences and environmental factors all facilitate retirees' obtaining more resources, which leads them to be more likely to switch from the downward trend to the upward trend. Therefore, in future studies, applying this resource-based dynamic perspective may further improve researchers' understanding about the form and the nature of the retirement process.

**Empirical Findings**

The empirical studies in the field of retirement adjustment have mainly focused on seeking answers for the following two research questions: (a) What is the general impact of retirement on the individual? and (b) What are the factors that influence retirement adjustment quality? Therefore, we organize our review by examining empirical findings that answer each of these two questions separately.

**The Impact of Retirement**

A large body of literature has considered the extent to which retirees are psychologically comfortable with the changed circumstances of life in retirement. Indicators of this psychological comfort have included happiness (Beck, 1982), emotional well-being (Richardson & Kilty, 1991), retirement satisfaction (Gall et al., 1997; Quick & Moen, 1998), life satisfaction (Calasanti, 1996), as well as mental health and depression (e.g., Midanik, Soghikian, Ransom, & Tekawa, 1995). These studies have in common that they infer adjustment indirectly via outcome measures. Recent literature has suggested more direct measures of adjustment, such as retirees' own evaluation of the difficulties they had in adjusting to retirement and the amount of time adjustment took (e.g., van Solinge & Henkens, 2005, 2008).

The literature has demonstrated a noticeable heterogeneity of findings in terms of the impact of retirement. Some research has found that retirees, in comparison with workers, tend to report greater depression and loneliness,
lower life satisfaction and happiness, a less positive view about retirement, and lower activity levels (e.g., J. E. Kim & Moen, 2002; Richardson & Kilty, 1991). In contrast, other research has found that most individuals tend to look forward to retirement (e.g., Dorfman, 1992) as well as to report being satisfied with retirement (e.g., Calasanti, 1996). Finally, retirement has been shown to be a benign event with no apparent impact on an individual’s well-being (e.g., Gall et al., 1997). Minimal differences in measures of mental health, coping, and health behaviors were reported between workers and retirees within a similar age range (e.g., Wu, Tang, & Yan, 2005).

To reconcile these inconsistent findings, Wang (2007) hypothesized that multiple forms of retirement transition and adjustment coexist in the retiree population. Using longitudinal data from two nationally representative samples obtained by the U.S. Health and Retirement Study and the growth mixture modeling technique (Wang & Bodner, 2007), he was able to consistently demonstrate that over an eight-year period in the retirement adjustment process, about 70% of retirees experienced minimum psychological well-being changes; about 25% of retirees experienced negative changes in psychological well-being during the initial transition stage but then showed improvements afterward; and about 5% of retirees experienced positive changes in psychological well-being. These findings suggest that retirees do not follow a uniform pattern of retirement adjustment.

Wang’s (2007) findings were further corroborated by Pinquart and Schindler (2007). They used a nationally representative sample of German retirees from the German Socioeconomic Panel Study and found that during retirement transition and adjustment, about 75% of German retirees experienced trivial changes in life satisfaction; about 9% of German retirees experienced a significant decrease in their life satisfaction during the initial transition stage but continued on a stable or increasing life satisfaction trajectory thereafter; and about 15% of German retirees experienced significant increases in their life satisfaction.

Taken as a whole, both studies suggest that multiple longitudinal change patterns in retirees’ psychological well-being exist during the retirement adjustment process and that these patterns correspond to different subpopulations of retirees. As such, these findings support the multiple-pathway dynamic nature of retirement adjustment, illustrating that the same retirement decision may lead to different adjustment processes in retirement for different retirees (Wang & Shultz, 2010). These findings also directly support the dynamic perspective we endorsed earlier, because they demonstrate systematic changes in retirees’ well-being over time.

A separate area of research focuses on the impact of retirement on health, as well as on more distal outcomes, such as longevity and mortality. Similar to what we concluded with regard to studies on retirement and psychological well-being, the empirical findings on this issue are also mixed. For example, Westerlund et al. (2009) investigated more than 14,000 members of a French occupational cohort seven years before and after retirement and found that retirement was associated with a decrease in suboptimum health. However, a longitudinal study of British civil servants by Mein et al. (2003) found that retirement had no effect on physical health but was associated with an improvement in mental health. Finally, using data from seven longitudinal waves of the Health and Retirement Study, Dave, Rashad, and Spasojevic (2008) found that complete retirement was associated with increases in illness conditions and difficulties in mobility and daily activities as well as with a decline in mental health over an average postretirement period of six years.

Adding uncertainty to these inconsistent findings is the fact that none of these studies explicitly examined the extent to which retirees were psychologically comfortable with their retirement life. Therefore, we simply still do not know whether retirees who had higher levels of adjustment to retirement enjoyed better health in their postretirement lives. For example, individuals who smoothly complete the process of social and psychological detachment from work may feel healthier. This may be reinforced whenever their postretirement lifestyle includes opportunities for positive health behavior, such as exercise-related leisure activities. Adjustment quality may also indirectly affect health. Retirees’ lack of adjustment to their retirement life often manifests as a risk factor for them to engage in maladaptive coping behaviors. For example, empirical studies found that lower levels of adjustment to retirement were associated with increased alcohol use (Perreira & Sloan, 2001) and increased smoking (Henkens et al., 2008).

Factors That Influence Retirement Adjustment Quality

Much research has been conducted in recent decades to identify factors that influence retirement adjustment quality. However, the theoretical basis of most of these studies remains rather implicit, with few hypotheses explicitly formulated (Wang & Shultz, 2010). Further, these studies usually focus on a relatively narrow set of explanatory factors, despite the fact that a wide variety of predictors of retirement adjustment quality have been considered in the literature. These predictors can be summarized in five broader categories: individual attributes, preretirement job-related variables, family-related variables, retirement-transition-related variables, and postretirement activities (Wang & Shultz, 2010). Table 1 presents a summary of these predictors’ effects on retirement adjustment quality, as well as citations of sample empirical studies in which these effects were identified.

In reviewing these empirical findings regarding the predictors of retirement adjustment quality, it is important to note that most of them are directly associated with different types of resources that retirees have during the retirement adjustment. For example, retirees’ physical and mental health, preretirement work stress and psychological and physical job demands, and postretirement leisure activities are associated with their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources. Retirees’ financial statuses, unemployment before retirement, number of dependent children,
retirement planning, and bridge employment activities are associated with their financial resources. Retirees’ marital status, spouses’ working status, marital quality, and post-retirement volunteer work and bridge employment are associated with their social resources. Retirees’ work role identity, preretirement job dissatisfaction, and retirement motivations are associated with their motivational resources. Finally, involuntary retirement, losing one’s partner during the retirement transition, and anxiety associated with the retirement transition are linked with retirees’ emotional resources. Therefore, the empirical findings in general are consistent with the resource-based dynamic perspective we proposed earlier. All in all, these findings suggest that resource change in important life domains is associated with the variation in retirement adjustment quality.

### Table 1

**Summary of Variables That Influence Retirement Adjustment Quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor category</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Sample empirical studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>J. E. Kim &amp; Moen, 2002; Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial status</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Gall et al., 1997; Pinquart &amp; Schindler, 2007; Quick &amp; Moen, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preretirement job-related variables</td>
<td>Work stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Wang, 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job demands</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998; Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job challenges</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>van Solinge &amp; Henkens, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job dissatisfaction</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment before retirement</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Pinquart &amp; Schindler, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work role identity</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998; Reitzes &amp; Mutran, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-related variables</td>
<td>Marital status (married vs. single/widowed)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Pinquart &amp; Schindler, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spouse working status (working vs. not)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Szinovacz &amp; Davey, 2004; Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of dependent children</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>S. Kim &amp; Feldman, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Losing a partner during the transition</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>van Solinge &amp; Henkens, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement transition-related variables</td>
<td>Voluntariness of the retirement</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Reitzes &amp; Mutran, 2004; van Solinge &amp; Henkens, 2005, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retirement planning</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Reitzes &amp; Mutran, 2004; Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retiring earlier than expected</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998; Wang, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retiring for health care reasons</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retiring to do other things</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retiring to receive financial incentives</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Quick &amp; Moen, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety associated with social activities</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>van Solinge &amp; Henkens, 2005, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Plus sign (+) denotes positive effect on retirement adjustment quality, and minus sign (−) denotes negative effect on retirement adjustment quality.

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**Future Directions in Retirement Adjustment Research**

Now that we have reviewed both theoretical and empirical advancements in the retirement adjustment literature, we propose several new research directions, based on the resource-based dynamic perspective, to help guide further theoretical and empirical examinations on retirement adjustment. First, although personality variables and dispositional traits have been shown to be important individual resources that influence adjustment quality in other types of life transition and adjustment processes (e.g., adjustment to unfamiliar work and cultural environments; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007), very few empirical studies have examined them as predictors of retirement adjustment quality. One exception is the study by Reitzes and Mutran (2004) that...
showed a positive relationship between retirees’ self-esteem and their retirement satisfaction. Another exception is a study by Gall et al. (1997) that showed a positive relationship between retirees’ internal locus of control and their retirement adjustment quality. Given that personality variables and dispositional traits are important for people in conducting emotional appraisals, setting up motivational priorities, and choosing coping strategies (Löckenhoff, Terracciano, & Costa, 2009), more research should focus on explicating how these variables may influence retirement adjustment quality.

Second, an evaluation of the literature on the impact of retirement reveals that most studies adopting a resource-based perspective have concentrated only on a narrow set of resources, in particular on retirees’ health and wealth (Wang & Shultz, 2010). As a result, social resources and the spouse’s resources have received less attention. A broader view that recognizes the impact of the social network may advance the existing literature on the prediction of retirement adjustment quality. In achieving this goal, the recent conceptualization of the role that “embeddedness” plays in an individual’s career adjustment may be particularly relevant. Embeddedness refers to a number of factors contributing to how enmeshed the individual is in his or her job, organization, and community (Fieldman, 2007). To the extent that retirees can draw resources from the social environment in which they are embedded their retirement adjustment may be facilitated.

Third, although Quick and Moen (1998) have already demonstrated that it might be fruitful to systematically examine the impact of different retirement motivations on retirees’ adjustment quality, few studies have done so. As a result, despite the fact that motivation research has made significant theoretical progress in conceptualizing the adjustment and coping process as a resource-based self-regulatory process (Wang et al., in press), this progress has not been applied to advance our understanding about the retirement adjustment process. Related motivational theories, such as affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), may be able to tie the examinations of retirement motivations and postretirement activities together and inform the processes that underlie retirement adjustment.

Fourth, although many self-help strategies have been proposed and described in popular media that aim to improve adjustment to retirement, little research has been conducted to specifically evaluate the effectiveness of these different self-help strategies. Given that many of these strategies have roots in established clinical and counseling psychology practices, we are confident that they would be effective in terms of addressing the stress and anxiety associated with the major life change embedded in the retirement transition. Nevertheless, whether these self-help strategies may improve the adjustment to retirement in a more general sense is still unclear. We urge future researchers to address this issue in a more systematic way.

Fifth, few studies have examined the effect of variables related to the socioeconomic context on retirement adjustment. These variables may include labor market demands, macroeconomic trends, government policies related to retirement (e.g., the Social Security and Medicare programs), and the social norms for retirement. To the extent that these variables may directly or indirectly influence retirees’ resources, they could have an important impact on retirees’ adjustment quality. For example, the only study (Pinquart & Schindler, 2007) that linked the regional labor force market to retirees’ adjustment showed that retirees who retired in a region where the unemployment rate was higher were more likely to experience increased life satisfaction than their counterparts who retired in a region where the unemployment rate was lower. This finding might have resulted because retirement constitutes an escape from the job insecurity and stress associated with labor markets in which jobs are difficult to find, thus saving retirees’ emotional and cognitive resources.

Sixth, in terms of research designs, the vast majority of previous studies in the field of employee retirement research have relied on cross-sectional designs. Although cross-sectional designs may be useful in establishing correlations between variables, it is difficult to capture the dynamic nature of the retirement adjustment process with them. Further, it is difficult to make sound causal inferences on the basis of correlational findings. Indeed, to test the resource-based dynamic perspective we are proposing here, one will need to directly examine how changes in resources over the course of retirement adjustment may lead to corresponding changes in retirees’ well-being. Modeling retirement adjustment as well-being change trajectories, as Wang (2007) and Pinquart and Schindler (2007) did, may help researchers directly test this theoretical framework. Therefore, we recommend that future research use more longitudinal designs to provide more information for understanding the causal processes.

Another methodological issue in previous retirement adjustment studies is that most studies rely on only a single or limited number of indicators of retirement adjustment quality. However, different adjustment indicators may be sensitive to changes in different types of resources. For example, retirees’ psychological well-being may be more sensitive to changes in emotional and cognitive resources, whereas their physical well-being may be more sensitive to changes in physical resources. Therefore, to increase understanding of the resource-based dynamic process in retirement adjustment, future studies should consider a more comprehensive view of the indicators of retirement adjustment.

**Conclusion**

In summary, in this article we have reviewed both theoretical and empirical research on the retirement adjustment process. Integrating theories that have been applied to the study of retirement adjustment, we propose to conceptualize retirement adjustment as a resource-based dynamic process in which retirees’ levels of adjustment may fluctuate as a function of resource change. We also summarized the up-to-date knowledge about the general pattern of retirement adjustment, as well as the predictors and consequences of retirement adjustment quality.
Understanding these empirical findings is particularly important for helping to improve individuals’ adaptation to retirement and their life quality in retirement. Finally, we discussed several future directions for retirement adjustment research based on the resource-based dynamic perspective. It should be noted that the theoretical and empirical advancements reviewed in this article are bounded by their specific socioeconomic and policy contexts. Changes have often occurred in these contexts (e.g., Social Security reform, health care reform, and early retirement incentive practices), which can alter the contexts when studying these phenomena and should also be prepared to tackle problems that emerge in practice.

REFERENCES


